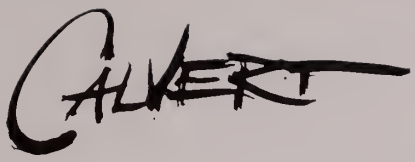
CULVERT



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LLoyd Hanna

Tod Ibrahim

Sonnet

The landscape in Eastern Maryland sinks
behind me seen only as the blackest
mars black in the rearview at night when I drive
home alone and no one follows. It is
the way I will think back on you: the way
I can almost trace the pattern within the land
within the darkness. It is as though
I can almost make out the space between

the sky at night and the night on land.
And as I pass field after row after field
after row after row of stalks of corn,
I decide to come back with you and place you

in a row of stalks and come back
and leave until I can leave without returning.

Air Moves Across the Lake Up Away From The Valley

for my father

It's always the same appearance in the mountains
in the winter in the east.
When you go to them the second time
they are no longer too cold or too quiet,
they are no longer too cold:
you can no longer see the wind go into the trees
and come back to the body;

you can no longer see the air rise from the river
wearing one full white robe;
you can no longer see the air
move across the lake up away from the valley.
If you miss these things the first time you visit in winter,
then you will miss them every time you go back.
It is like the only child to an older father,

to the father who never thought he'd have an only son.
He is the father who begins every sleep
with the thought of the future generations
of his family moving further away from where
he had started so long ago that maybe now
his only son can move back to his father's home.
He is the father who knows that his son's family

will always move away as easily as the sky moves
when it begins to melt the snow in the afternoon
only to begin to freeze it again at dusk.
And by morning the ground is so cold
that it can't begin to melt past the point
where it was by midafternoon the day before.
This is almost the process of the relationship

between the father and the only son:
the melt and freeze, melt and freeze, the melt and freeze:
the air rising from the water:
the air slipping up into the valley
through the trees up into the blue
where it passes within the dusk and the afternoon,
where it becomes the sky.

Laura Bellows

Birds

I heard them on my windowsill this morning,
three dark birds pecking at the glass.
I could see the heat rising off their bodies
in the light cast on the opposite wall—
a delicate, near-invisible smoke
spinning from their backs: a pin-wheel rising.

When I went from the bed to look, they dove
like the leaves and bits of paper that blow up
and down, the wind throwing them as moths
will throw themselves, repeatedly,
against a light.
They were not crows, sending their coughs against

the buildings. It was a day like this,
with a violent sky, cold for summer,
when I heard a pair of crows turn the notch
into a bowl of echoes—their calls
amplified and twisted into a moaning voice.
I looked for them flying, before the rocks,

and wished myself with them so I might sit
there above the glacier-carvings
or discover the air, as clear a shape,
changing against my body, as a stone
falling or a river.
And the birds today inspire that same

need to fly that always moves me in high
places—the tops of mountains or
the balcony. I'm sorry that it's too cold,
now, to sit there in the sun watching
the sky, the clouds painting it different
across the hours. The sun turns the

apartment colors: purpling it in evening
like a bruise over the room
and the horizon. And the moon, when it's full
or just before or just after fullness,
is like a pale, pale sun; and like mirrors
in a periscope, it sends the sun's light
onto the wall in the shape of morning,
dimmed.

Train Ride

In Ramirez' drawings, the hillside
becomes a church—carved into arches
layered on one another like fish scales.
And though the empty house with the sky
in its ruined arches is not a church

it has the silence of one. And the bridge,
too, where we stood with plastic cups of beer
in our hands when you put your arm around me
and said: It's not Venice; I can't give you that.
Shall we throw our glasses down?

We could have been saints in their niches—
standing in the high curve of the bridge.
I sat in the dark with my book closed
and looked back to it before I half-slept,
dreaming about a bee buried in a pear

and Mexico, Ramirez' arches
riddling the countryside like a sea sponge's
corridors or termite-rotten wood: each arch
a tunnel to the center of the earth,
the train lost in there somewhere.

From the window I watched the shell of the
building pass and an abandoned kiln
carved into the land, as in one of the drawings,
where the arches made the hillside there were so many of them.
At that moment, in my mind, I left the train

to stand in the arches—the sky above me,
as when I stood with you above the tracks,
the bricks curving over as a frame.
And to walk further down
to Cumberland to find the place we said

we'd live if we moved there for a summer.
I would lie in the mottled colors cast
on the floor by the stained glass windows
or have you lie there while I photographed
you, first in black and white,

the shape of the window enshrining
your body, the rooms quiet except for the humm
of dust in the light-shaft and the faucet dripping.
One time, when I thought of you, I thought,
also, of a day in Greece when I had passed

through orange groves for hours and a field
gold-green with mustard flowers.
It was getting dark but the dusk, instead
of painting things a persimmon light,
washed away all color leaving the landscape

grey except for the oranges.
We paid a boy to go into the grove
and pick some of them for us. When we ate
them, the juice ran through our fingers to make
large, dark marks on the street.
Another time we stole the oranges ourselves.

Drawings

One of the models we had for drawing class, Karyn,
had long, blond hair that she pulled back in one braid,
and glasses. She was thin,
the ridges of her spine and hip bones prominent
under her skin,
like sheets draped over unupholstered, wooden furniture.

Her eyes, during a pose, were in constant motion.
The professor, once, had to ask her to keep her eyes still;
it was hard to draw her face with her eyes darting
so frightened and bird-like.

The old man who modeled
wore a wide black g-string instead of sitting for us nude.
He had a blue and black flannel robe that he put it on behind.

When he posed, he would sleep in the chair,
falling slowly out of it, his body, at the end of the day,
turned away from our drawings.
We had to draw him quickly,
in the first half hour before he started to move.
We used the rest of the day to give the drawings
depth, to find the colors in his skin
and layer them on paper until he came alive
under our hands.

He brought his groceries with him to class one day
and gave three of us cold, sweet plums, purple-black
on the outside and bleeding with red juice
when we bit into them.
He went through his bag for us,
had us admire the green peppers while he talked
about making chili con carne.

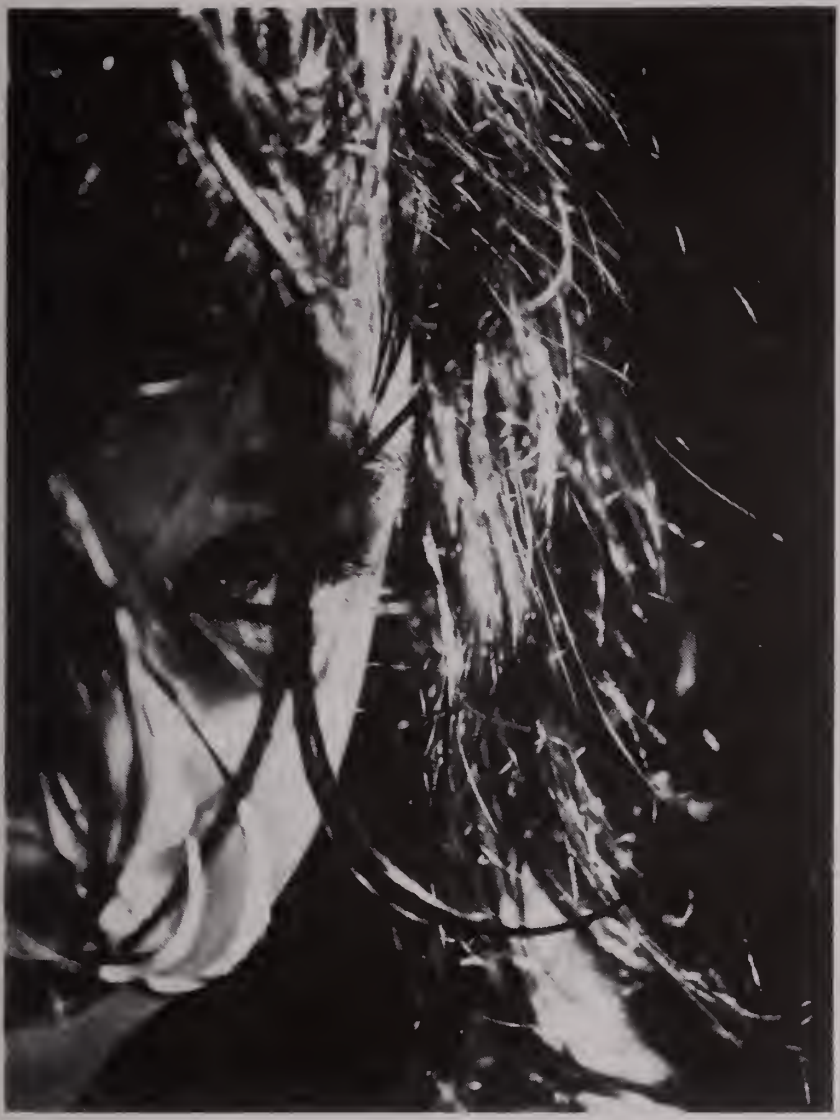
During breaks, he would stand next to the window
with his robe on but open
and throw a cigarette up, over and over,
trying to catch it in his mouth.
It would hit his upturned face
and bounce against his chest before it fell;
he would cradle his hands together against his belly
to try to trap the cigarette on its way to the floor.

I saw him after class one night,
standing on the corner
talking out to anyone and no one.
He was sort of singing
and sort of tap dancing, telling the empty street
about the shows he was in once, how handsome he was then.

His skin was white and wrinkled.
It fell in soft colored lines
closely draped on his chest,
and stomach, and legs.

His name was John.

Ambereen Sleemi



Kyna Taylor

History By Narration, or The Tales of My Mother's Demon

There is fifteen years between my mother and her sister. And in all the years of my life, my mother would not let me speak in great length with my aunt, for fear that she would corrupt me. Mom says that her life, that their lives, are rooted in a different and darker world that has nothing to do with me. But I tell her that if I am to know the story of my bones, I must begin at the beginning. "Bone-tales," my aunt calls her narrative. She begins at the beginning.

When I was a child, I lived on a poor dirt farm with my family. I call it a dirt farm because that's all we had — a few chickens, a couple cows, and a whole lot of dirt. Dirt for miles. Lord, you could look in any direction and all you could see from one corner of your eye to the other was flat land and dirt. Maybe it wasn't all that bad. Dirt could go from light brown to dark brown. But it could drive you crazy, all that unbroken brown rubbing against the sky.

The banks sold us that dirt for every penny my Poppa had. He said it beat share-cropping in western Texas. My father lied some, but maybe share-cropping is worse than getting swallowed by dirt. There were a few shacks like ours on the plains, separated by about two hundred yards, along with a few fences to keep in the cows and a few blades of grass. There were barns to house the chickens. But that's all we could grow on that dirt: shacks and black people. Everything faded to a uniform brown.

The world was so flat we could see a storm heading for us before it came within a hundred miles of our yard fence. Way off in the distance my sisters and I would watch the black clouds pile on each other as the wind blew, until the ones on top fell over and went under the ones on the bottom, making the whole heap roll. Sometimes it would take all day for that wheel to crank on to us. Sometimes all that blackness would eat the plain like a thing alive. And when it was grey between the black and the brown we knew that a hundred miles away all that dirt was turning to mud. Until that wet beast ate our farm, our skies were blue.

Yes, I lived during the Depression. And let me tell you, the Depression was when a lot of white folks got real poor real quick. I suppose it's possible that some of our people got hurt by it, but none of the black folks I knew even flinched. Try pinching a dead man to see if he'll hop around and cry "Ouch!" For us, going from poor to poorer was so short a trip no one even noticed the ride. None of the banks even tried to take away our land. Hell, who would want to deal with a bunch of desperate and irate Negroes with a marked taste for shotguns? Dirt can be had anywhere without a fraction of that trouble.

One night after a ring dance at Peterson's barn, Timmy Jacobson and I crept into an old smokehouse to drink the latest batch from my father's still. Timmy was so big he had to duck past the hooks dangling from the ceiling, designed to hold cow rib-cages and such. In the lantern's light I noticed that some hooks were crusted over with dried blood gone black. I didn't like the place. Old man Peterson hung himself on one of the hooks when his wife left him. I thought the place was haunted. But the grain was good and Timmy was better and I was sure the ghost would let us be.

Next month when I told Timmy that my cycle was late, he didn't even blink. He wanted to do right by me and went looking for a wedding ring. I didn't feel like doing right by Timmy so I went looking for the Midwife. She gave me some foul-smelling green brew to bring it off and I spent the day in bed. I remember that I had dreams of worms like green syrup slipping into my belly—my woman's belly—to eat at the little nit that grew there. I watched my Momma die to give little Sharon to my father. And just who was Timmy Jacobson to be worth all that? What man's nit is worth all that?

My grandfather, Elizah, liked to see God everywhere. If God wasn't in Elizah's shack by Elizah's black stove, then God was not home. And when God wasn't sitting in His throne in that decrepit shack, then God was always looking into it from the sky above. Elizah would point to a corner of the ceiling and shout, "Do you see it? God's eye peeking in on us?" I could always talk him into telling me about God's eyelashes; Grandpa said they were black and fluffy, as if they were made of the storm clouds that roared over the plains in the summertime. I still wish I had seen those lashes.

One day, Elizah and God must have had a falling out. Old Pop grabbed his shotgun that bright morning and blew a hole into the ceiling where God's eye had blinked. But God is persistent and before you could sigh twice that eye had appeared in a different part of the old man's roof. So God kept looking and Elizah kept shooting until there was no part of that ceiling that wasn't peppered with buckshot. Elizah had just run out of his homemade shells and was throwing old bits of tire rubber (which he kept for rainy days) into the air when the Almighty, probably in a huff, took the hint and left the crazy old fool. The light streaming through the new air-holes in that roof made some kind of effect, with all those tiny sunbeams bouncing off an old man's shiny pate. Everyone on the plains laughed. And so did I. But I took Elizah's shotgun just in case I started to look divine.

Sharon caught a cold and died. Just like that. No doctor with a house-note would step foot on our porch, the hospitals wouldn't take us back then, and medicine never came our way. We were dropping as fast as we were birthing and the root-workers and midwives had all they could do to ease our way into one or the other. When my mother was pregnant with my last little sister, the root-woman says to her, "Don't name that baby, Ann."

And Momma says, "I name all my babies. Her name is Sharon."

And the root-woman says, "Names are for the living. Death is about that little one."

And Momma says, "I haven't sent one of my children to sweet Jesus without a name. When God calls her, he'll call her by her name. Sharon."

So God called Momma and God called Sharon and they rest in the churchyard with all our other little ones. The ones who caught a fever and died, who caught a chill and died, who were born jaundiced or starved in the womb and died. They

went all kinds of ways. And with them went their mothers sometimes. The plains people used to say that Sadie, the root-woman, would whisper the names of all the dead women and children into a magical glass jar. One day, when the wind and the blowing dirt had washed the names from the stones by the church, someone would open that jar and go mad with hearing how many souls we had lost.

I was about eighteen years old when I went to New Orleans to shake the dirt out of my shoes. The men there were so bold and dashing: dark grey zoot suits flowing over their graceful forms, bright silk shirts, and those cool felt hats perched on their processed heads. Sometimes they wore jewelry, bright gold halos to strong black hands. I don't quite recall what the women were wearing, except that when I got my outfit, gold and glittery and loose all over, I lost all the money I made clearing tables at "The Lion's Den." We all wore knives then, we women. We had sheaths just below our right hips holding short, slim stilettos. The girls at the club had to teach me how to use it—we didn't need knives to play in the dirt back home.

We all had jazz lovers then, too. If you were real pretty, you could hook yourself a band-leader, or maybe the head of a jazz quartet. I was never more than plain, handsome if you were feeling especially kind, so the best I could manage was a devilish piano-man from Grand Coteau. That boy worked well with his fingers. His hair was never out of place. Slim, wiry, and dart-like, he reminded me of the stiletto I had wrapped around my thigh. Behind his piano he would kiss and coo until the house would shake and everyone would swear that he was the best. Five hours later, not one of those people could remember his name. Neither could I, so I called him "Daddy." "Daddy" had lead shoes when it came to money, always on the verge of sinking for good. He never really went under. But after a life's worth of struggle, he never got much more than his upper lip above the water.

Jonathan Barnes, the man who owned the "Den," had two sons go to the war. He thought it was a big honor. They put all our black men in their own regiments, separate from the white soldiers. I thought it was a damned clever way to destroy some of our best. The white man is no fool and has more schemes for erasing people running around in his fevered brain than the swamp has snakes slithering through the water. He asked me what I thought about those damn Germans and all our black heroes fighting together. I told him it was a crock of nonsense: why should our boys die in a dispute between a bunch of white folks? He told me that women just didn't understand and never will.

When his boys died, one near Alsace and the other in southern Italy, Barnes didn't feel like doing much of anything anymore. Didn't want his friends, didn't want his business, didn't feel like booking bands and stopping brawls and writing the cash totals in the back of his Bible. I told him that those boys had it good. There's a hell of a difference between dying quickly in a magical-sounding place like Alsace and crawling to some marshy place of the bayou to die like an animal. Barnes just shook his head. "Dead is dead," he muttered and gave me the Bible and "The Lion's Den." It was the first lucky break for me in all my twenty-five years.

It was the tail-end of a marshy summer night when I looked into the mirror and stared at an old woman. The years hardly make a sound when they stomp you, face and body, and make the soul start dreaming about crossing rivers on a tiny raft of red and yellow roses. Then come those days when you are surprised to see yourself

alive at all in the morning. So I give your mother a call and I say, "Lillian, I'm feeling pretty old."

And she says, "I bet you look it too."

And I say, "Did they teach you anything up at the college other than how to be stuck up and persnickety? Something useful, like how to keep time from sitting in my joints and making them creak every time the clouds roll in?"

And she says, "No, nothing like that. But I'll send you my daughter and she might know."

And I say, "Oh, the med student."

And she says, "That's the one."

And I say, "Well send her down, then."

And she says, "Alright. But if you try to teach her how to screw two men at the same time like you tried to teach me, I'll kill you, Rue."

She likes to call me that. Rue. Don't even think of calling me that. Use the name my mother gave me. And whisper it in a jar when I am gone. My name is Elizabeth.

Lillian Frankel

The Young Teacher

And there I was standing
my first day of teaching
the boys running around
the room, hitting each other
yelling

And any minute she would come in
the principal
eying me
behind her reading glasses

And just then
it flew into the room
through the just-opened window

a butterfly

Hey, catch it, Mike
someone hollered
and that's when I got the idea

Sit down, I yelled
and watch.
And I stood there
my arm outstretched

Dear God, let this butterfly
land on me . . .
anywhere

And I prayed to all the nuns
I ever knew
to Sister Eileen
and Sister Madeline
Dear God . . . let it come . . .

And to Father Corcoran
. . . and let it land on me
anywhere

I prayed to my dead Irish Catholic friends
like Bill Halloran and Mary Tracy

And the kids watched
how it circled
around and around me

And I stood like the angel
in front of St. Mels
as it flew over my head
and around my ears
and down my legs and up again
and then it stopped
and sat on the tip of my finger

you could hear a pin drop

Bob Jewett

Eating Apples

(for my father)

I remember sharing a bag of apples with you
when I was about thirteen.
They were small apples, so we sat down
on the grass of the front lawn that was no longer
a summer green, was in fact edging towards brown,
and began to eat one after the other
and we talked about growing up.

You told me a lot about when you were a boy
in Massachusetts and living on a farm,
picking apples, feeding the chickens
and berrying on the hills outside of town.
You explained learning to distinguish between
the varieties of apples, how hardy the Stayman was
with its mottled skin the color granite would be

if it were red, how good the lime Granny Smith
was for cooking, how the crisp MacIntosh,
its cover an artist's color study in red,
yellow and green, was the best for eating,
better than the scarlet Winesap, a cider apple,
much better than the generic Delicious we were eating
off the two trees behind the Hardin's across the street.

You said you'd never forget the rooster
you grew up with, tall and brown,
who became nastier and nastier the older
he got until one day he attacked
and they had to kill him.
Tried to eat him too, but when
that stringy old bird was on the table,

you found out no one could.
I began to feel full of apples just then,
but you just looked at my glasses,
my first pair that I had gotten
that summer, and began the story of when
you first got glasses, how it took
till the end of high school, during your physical

when you tried to join the Air Force,
to find out that you were nearly blind
in one eye, how you never knew things
could have such a sharp edge to them, how it was
too late for them to help your
batting average in baseball.
By then, we had finished the bag.

Cathy Poulin

A Patch of Light Through A Hole In The Roof

It has stopped being like summer,
These trees the color of sap,
The color of deep clouds
That fade into the sky.
The early stars are hooded in the pines.
When I look up I feel the wind, more stormy,
The tops of the trees awake
In the leaves that cover the dirt. I lift
My coat and walk through the leaves
And the small animals scatter
Or run out in front of me. Then
Under the trees, where there's
A tear in the roof of the forest,
A small light comes in

Like something unearthed, something
The size of my hand. There's
A low creek and a stone wall around it
Like an abandoned train driven into
The dirt on both sides. I walk
Along the top, like a rail, I look
Around me with my eyes closed,
I still hear this morning's rain.

In the music building, I go alone
To the room where we were yesterday
When I could not face you.
Again, I go into the music, further
This time into the hold of the piano,
The way my hands go into that

Small space that's like a path
Where something moves on the wind.
The rest of me has climbed a hill,
Lying in the grass with the weight
Of the sun going down.
My body takes it in, the rest
Of the sunset, and then it's dark.
It was like seeing you there, sitting
On a blanket and the sounds of
Night in the trees.

When I leave the building, it is dark.
This is the slope, dark fence,
The sky, no moon. Behind the
Big brick house, is the horse's stall.

The doors open on a patch of light
The size of the dog at home
That I lift in my arms, smaller
Each time, and through the dark, it's
A leaf-like thumbprint on the sky,
A burn in the skin. The horse sees me
Moving close and doesn't move.
Shadowy mane and a white patch on the
Brunt of her forehead. She stands
In the coppery light under bales
Of hay. Behind her a bird on the
Window sill turns like folded leaves,
All held together by wooden boards,
By her standing there as I pass.

In Winter In Maine

The air is cold
Between my steps and the ice
Where we cross this lake
With a blue dog as you run with
The black dog who falls and spins.
I speed up, moving towards the
Island. My father grew up

An hour west of here. We wind through
The tall grass in the wind above the ice.
Then I hear the sound up ahead
As your leg disappears beneath
The surface of the cold, another
Step, then I fall in too,
Under the ice broken like a shadow

Into the cold black water. I
Look down at the dark, moving
Like ice above the trees, a frozen
Moon as you are also frozen, climbing
Towards the island. Under
The ice is stillness,
The ice is listening,

It is a field of shadows,
A place where I sleep when
All light leaves my body,
Like the cold in the shape of a
Wall that I back away from.
I push away hard with my legs
Until out of the water, I wake

Like thin straw. My ears burn
Red. The moon holds on
To nothing and the ice goes dark.
Across the island and through
the snow, now I run in the open
Space. There, where the wind blows
Harder. It's not a gentle cold.

Dan Yuen

St. Mark's

Nite of the 3 Kings

Hungry and the Homeless

The Gig

Soup Kitchen: Lower East Side's Alphabet City

Subway: Lexington Express

Checkpoint

for Jürgen

One afternoon in summer we had gathered
around a green meadow. It was Sunday
and the sky hung warmly over the town.
I was twelve years old and believed there would

be a change. I wore my lightgreen skirt
with the lavender stripe above the hem.
That afternoon we stood among the mothers
and daughters and sons. Mother held your hand.

He is a kid and could get lost. That's why
she holds his hand. I know he'll come, I know.
The bus—it's here! There, across the field!
I just know he is here. Glücklicher Wanderer

it said on the side of the skyblue bus
in darkblue lettering, shaded with white.
It was such a new bus with tinted windows
up front in case the sun would shine and cause

a glare. It entered the meadow and stopped
far over on the other side. One man
came out, down from that beautiful bus,
then more. Some had rags tied around their feet

because it's so cold in Russia and ten years
is a long time. The clothes are torn
and stuff spills out. I know he is here—
if we just stayed, I know he'd come.

Mother held your hand and mine when we walked
away from that place and the people. Only once
we'd all been together, that winter,
in the small town in the East, when Mother

was pregnant with you. I remember the station,
the platform crowded with people, the screams,
the train already full when it stopped,
and father's soldierbrown boots. He held me

on his arms. Then, because of Mother and us,
those close and around us made a path,
a narrow channel bearing forward,
pushed her through and up onto the train

so she could open a window from inside.
I still hear the snap of the window pushed open,
the snap of the door when he lifted me up.

Karl Alfred Wolken

Translated from German by Ilse Winkelmann

The Tree in Front of the Window

The big tree in front of the house
is filled with birds,
even in winter.
Starlings, not wanting to go on.

Their destination is Africa,
but they stay. Their quiet
and far away rustling of flight
is marking time.

What more? This happens in front
of the bedroom window. The tree vibrates
with the tender thrusts from within,
the many birds in him.

We go to sleep, wake up in the morning—
they are still there.
I don't know, how that is.
It seems wrong.

The long journey, from Sweden
perhaps or Russia, ends here.
A quiet roaring of bird voices,
but it's winter.

We can't explain this.
We sit up in bed and listen.
It uplifts us how the old tree
is stirred within

and, without moving away,
almost flies. Holderlin's *Fittige*
moved the air like this
in Swabian Greece.

Scarcely you hear this word anymore,
its voice being lost.
But the tree and the starlings affirm,
sweet songs as if from former times.

Allen Larson

Nerja, Spain

An anchored fishing boat
is dissolving in from the last moments
of moonlight. I didn't come here searching,

but sometimes you find things,
the way the stones round and smoothed
from the sea curve beneath you, and hold you.

The only other sound
is the fishermen hauling their gear onboard
upshore. They come only for what

they can carry to market,
for what is pulled up in nets, and held,
and passed, living in this light, washed,

like Picasso blue.

Anniversary

1

This year there was no snow
to mark the day, no closings,
and no sound of wheels spinning
on the ice at night. It was clear,

with Mars the war god ascended,
hanging in the sky like the shield
of an emperor, the way it has been
all through this winter,

and four stars
arranged like a frame to the North —
people used to believe they were
the corners of the door to heaven.

2

I never got to tell you this:
The day before you died I saw the Matisse.
There was a mirror standing in a corner
that held the crimson lines of the carpet
as if they were woven there, and a violin case,
open like a child's casket, empty
on a bed. I've been to Nice since then.

There's a photograph taken from our bed
of a doorway where the morning light
split itself to colors through glass
and the geraniums in a box on the balcony
color the eye like a waning sun.

3

We stayed in bed all morning
that day eating apricot jam
and stale bread that we stole
from a hostal in Bordeaux,
smoking too much, and telling stories:

the taste of the Chesapeake Bay,
being pulled up to the boat
by my arms and examined
for the red traces of sea nettles,

and sometimes, near the end of the day,
you put me at the helm,
placed the rutter in my hands,
pointed out the buoys and markers,
and lay back with your eyes closed,
letting your feet skim the tips of the whitecaps.

4

And I've been to Nerja since then,
where at night the *pescadores*
sit outside their tents around fires
cracking the shells of their catch

and the water holds a path
of moonlight so solid and still
I almost thought I could walk
across it.

I left my clothes
on the shore and washed myself there.

5

I should admit that I didn't mean
to think of you, that going
to the O'Keefe show that same day
this year was not a memorial,
it just happens, the way a person
could spend a lifetime finding one shape,

called back again and again
like a southern migration near winter
to the bones of a long-past life
held up to the sky, or less, a shell,
empty and white, that once might have cradled
the ashes of something loved
and given back to the sea.

Leiden

I thought of Leiden this morning,
of taking our clothes to the laundry
and the two women folding linen
who worked there. I thought of the cloth
whitened and pulled from rollers,
and the way the women stepped
towards and away from each other
exchanging corners, and more,
in the eyes, as if this movement were stored
in the bone, everything romantic,

feeling as free as we did,
as though what we carried on our backs
was all we had in the world,
as if there were no packed-up boxes
in basements at home, no sub-let apartment,
empty and cleaner upon our return,
imagining all we had fit in one spin-dry load
in Leiden, in summer, and nothing,
nothing more to do than watch women
paced smoother than music
fold their own silhouettes over and over
into piles.

Margaret Bright

A Song of Songs

It is midnight. I have tried to sleep, but can not, so have risen from the bed and come to the window. I am standing beside the window, now leaning against a pane of glass, wearing the pink night gown my mother gave to me. The glass is cold against my fingers, chin, and cheek. All is silent except for the ticking of the clock and my own breathing.

Father and Mother lie in the adjacent bedroom. The ticking of the clock does not disturb their sleep. Even the transgression of their only daughter does not disturb their sleep.

I look out the window. In the darkness of midnight I can not see the garden—the roses, or the lilies, or the hollyhocks—but only the branches of the mulberry tree against the moonlight. I have climbed among the branches of the mulberry tree, eaten its berries, and felt its leaves against my cheek, even as a woman. I have disobeyed my father's commandment. "You may not climb among the branches of the mulberry tree, as you are no longer a child, but a woman," my father has said to me.

I am fourteen. Early this morning I walked with my father and my mother in the garden. The dew clung to the grass and to our naked feet. My father carried a satchel of birdseed; my mother, a pair of garden-shears; and I, an earthen pitcher. Father had come to feed the sparrows; Mother and I, to gather lilies.

At one of two natural brooks that run the length of the garden, my father paused, reached into the satchel of seed, and lifted his palm to heaven. The sparrows came to him but momentarily, alighted on his fingers, and nibbled at the seed. "Is the sparrow still your favorite bird?" my father asked. "Yes, Dad," I replied, "the meek and humble sparrow, with the precious tiny face." My father gave me birdseed, and I too fed the sparrows.

Mother had snipped a lily. I turned at the clip of the shears. She had tucked the petals at the crown of her hair, all glinting gold in early sunlight. "You're beautiful, Mum," I said to her. She snipped a second lily and tucked it in my hair. "And you are like your mother, now that you are a woman." I am fourteen.

We wandered among the lilies, around the beds of roses, and to the hollyhocks that stand beside the wall. "The hollyhocks are mine," I said. I planted them myself, just a month ago, from seed. They have grown almost as tall as I. I stood among their blossoms, as if to take the measure. Father and Mother laughed at me. Then I ran along the wall and into the center of the garden, from which rises the mulberry tree. I stroked the bark of the trunk of the tree and stretched forth my hand for a leaf. When my hand would not reach the leaf, I started to climb, and would have climbed, had Father not called, "You may no longer climb the tree, now that you are woman."

I am fourteen, standing beside my bedroom window, leaning against a pane of glass. The glass is cold against my fingers, chin, and cheek.

When my father had fed the sparrows and Mother had gathered lilies, all clustered white and green in the earthen pitcher, and both had returned inside for breakfast, I climbed the mulberry tree, stretched out along one of its branches, felt a leaf against my cheek, listened to the morning bells of the Old Church of Chelsea, smelled the roses and the lilies and the hollyhocks from below, the sunlight from above, and milk-loaves and currant-cakes and scones and tea from Mrs. Beaton's bake shop along the Old King's Road. "Old King Charles the Second's Road," I always say to Father. "And I am Nell Gwynn who so charmed the king he had built the road to come to me." But Father always denies the truth of the tale and swears it only a legend.

From the branch of the tree I lifted my head and stretched forth my neck to see the Old King's Road, the men in summer suits and women in summer dresses, about their weekly shopping, stopping for a scone, dipping their scones together in tea. Then I shifted position in the tree and faced the church and river, to see the young couples strolling along the Embankment, tossing a twig or a stone or a seed into the Thames. When the sun shone in my face, I stretched again along the branch of the tree, felt a leaf against my cheek, and fell asleep.

I awoke to the sound of some one's singing, some one's singing beyond the wall of the garden and the branches of the tree. In the song I heard my name, ny name only, as though the singer were calling only to me. I lifted my head from the branch and said, "Here I am." Then I looked down from the branches of the tree and saw below, on the opposite side of the wall, a young man, perhaps eighteen, looking up at me. I lowered my head, waiting for him to speak.

"What are you doing in the tree?" he asked.

"I have been asleep. Your singing awakened me."

"Well, do you like my song or not?" he said.

"I liked your singing my name."

"Your name's a lovely one to sing."

"Sing it again," I said, "please."

So the young man sang the song again, sang my name only, called only to me, brought me down from the tree, and over the wall, to where he was singing.

"I'm glad you've come down from the tree," he said,"so that I may know you better. A name without a person is altogether lacking."

"Yes, I suppose it is," I said, and lowered my head, blushing.

"Where will we go?" the young man asked. "Or will we stay beneath this tree?"

"I think I should like to go to the Thames."

So we walked to the outer wall, this young man and I, down Oakley Street, across the Cheyne Walk, to the Embankment side of the Thames. When we had walked as far as the Chelsea Bridge, he told me his name and suggested we sit on a bench so that we might share a breakfast there. He reached into a satchel, as Father had done to feed the sparrows, only drew forth not seed, but two purple plums and wheaten scones instead.

"These are from Mrs. Beaton's bake shop," I said, biting into a scone.

"Yes. I'm sorry I have no jam, and nothing for us to drink."

"It's no matter," I said.

"Tell me of yourself," he said.

"If you tell me of you."

So we told each other our histories there, along the bank of the Thames, and when he had finished, I felt so ashamed, knowing so little of life in comparison to him, this

young man of the world so to speak, that I hung my head and petulantly tossed the plum-stone into the Thames.

"Show me the world," I said. The young man rose from the bench, took my hand, and led me to the grounds of Kensington Palace, to the shores of the Serpentine.

"Now I would like to ride in a boat." The young man rented for us a yellow row-boat, the palest of yellows, with two striped seats. He led me aboard and started to row. I heard the music of the summer band, the jubilant summer brass, from the pavilion to the east, smelled lemon ice and lemon punch and lemon tea from the refreshment stand to the west, stroked the lemon-yellow and white of the striped seat, and tasted a drop of rain on my tongue, for it had started to rain, but ever so gently. Then I looked to my young man. He had left off rowing for a moment and was smiling. His hair was getting wet, glistening while getting wet, the rain-streaked wings of the blue-black raven. I knew not what to say, or do, so turned my seat to watch the children play, as children will play in the rain, bringing to shore their miniature boats, with no striped seats and no young man of the world to row, taking rest and shelter beneath the old familiar statue of Pan, Peter Pan that is, even sitting in Peter's worn lap.

My young man of the world had rowed ashore and was carrying me out of the boat. "Let us go in from the rain," he said. His hair was dripping wet, dripping blue-black wet from his forehead to my chin to my neck, soaking his shoes.

We took shelter together in the National Gallery's rooms, rooms so warm I half-feared I would fall asleep again and miss out on the rest of the world. When we came upon the portrait of *Miss Willoughby*, my young man laughed. "She is as petulant as you were along the bank of the Thames," he said, "petulantly tossing the plum-stone into the Thames," petulantly fingering the roseate sash, leaning against the pane of the window-glass, drawn back into the present, wearing the pink night gown my mother gave to me, and a wilted lily in my hair.

I have climbed among the branches of the mulberry tree, eaten its berries, and felt its leaves. I have even sat in the midst of a thousand water-lilies, and risen from the sea, for after we left the National Gallery, my young man led me to Paris—to a thousand painted lilies of the Orangerie, lilies not all white as those of the garden, but blossoming with color, with reds and blues and pinks and greens—and to Florence as well, to the gallery Uffizi, where Botticelli's *Venus* rises from the sea.

"You are the woman of this painting," my young man said, "wading among the lily blossoms, now rising from the sea."

At twilight we left the Uffizi, climbed the hill of the Pitti palace, and entered the Boboli Gardens. I could smell nothing but pine trees. The young man stopped at the top of the hill, beneath the boughs of a single pine, so that we might rest. Together we kneeled.

"I am hungry," I said, for I had had nothing to eat since breakfast.

"I've nothing to eat, and no money left, unless perhaps you'd like the seeds of this tree," he said.

"I have never tasted them."

"No? Well, they're exceedingly good to eat. The Italians eat them fresh," he said, rising and pulling from a lower bough a single cone, spherical in shape. "'Pignolas' they're called, here in Italy." He peeled the scales from the cone and gave me the seeds, smooth, fragrant seeds, the color of cream, and tasting of the tree.

"Thank you," I said. "I should be going back soon."

"Yes."

Shortly after we had eaten the pine seeds, he brought me back to Chelsea, to the

garden of Oakley Street. We climbed over the wall together, to beneath the branches of the mulberry tree. The moonlight shone on his raven-hair.

"Are you tired?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, "but oh it was the grandest of tours."

"Will you sleep beneath this tree?"

"Yes, I think I shall. Will you sleep beneath it with me?"

He nodded that he would.

"Before we sleep, however," I said, "I must bring us mulberries." So once again I climbed the tree, picked a palmful of the ripest berries, climbed down again, and together we ate. When we had finished eating, we lay beneath the tree, in the midst of fallen berries. My young man placed his left hand under my head, then leaned over and kissed me. His kiss was as the mulberry leaf against my cheek. "Goodnight," he said.

I awoke to the sound of my mother's calling, to her calling my name and "Where are you?" from the kitchen window. I looked about the ground but my young man was no longer there. I thought to search among the branches of the tree, to look beyond to the opposite side of the wall, and had begun to climb, and would have climbed, had Father not called, "Come down from the tree." I turned to look at him. His forehead was glowing under moonlight. My father was angry.

I ran towards the kitchen, towards my mother behind the window, but she only closed the window against me, turned her back, and wiped her hands across her apron.

I ran among the lilies, beside the wall of hollyhocks, scraped my knee against a thorn of one of Mother's roses, so that my knee was bleeding.

When I entered the kitchen my mother bid me wash my knee and also the soles of my naked feet, which had been stained by fallen mulberries. I did as she had bidden me and returned to the table. Neither my father nor my mother spoke to me, except to ask me to pass the peas, to deny me dessert, and to send me to bed. But I could not sleep, so rose from bed and came to the window.

I am standing beside the window, now leaning against a pane of glass, wearing the pink night gown my mother gave to me. The glass is so cold against my fingers, chin, and cheek. All is silent except for the ticking of the clock and my own breathing.

Father and Mother lie in the adjacent bedroom. The ticking of the clock does not disturb their sleep. Even the transgression of their only daughter does not disturb their sleep. Were I yet a child and without transgression, I might go in to them, find comfort there, and sleep. But I can not, as a woman, give them that satisfaction.

Valerie Russell

Legend

(for e)

I still hear you sometimes
though you have been gone
for quite a while. The young

green twigs have thickened
for years around the dirt pile
where they put the box

that they fit over your bones.
Your same peculiar shape comes
to visit, in my dreams, where

your breath hovers, whirling,
through the space that keeps us
separate. I will come there,

eventually. We all disappear
behind those eyes that can open
or awaken in the mouths of children.

Newborn

Like the layered heat of
a summer sun, you awaken early.
Soft, your cries reach in-

to my dreams and motion me awake
to rock you. Your skin
bunches warm, elastic. Quick,

your small mouth stretches
wide around my tender breasts. I tense,
a burn like flash-fires.

Slowly, I melt into the rhythm pull,
giving. This makes the pain
bearable as you tug me towards some

semblance of where we both
began. I think I am awake and watching
your eyes flicker sparks

that stare, unfocused. I imagine
you still see the cloudy,
enclosed waters from the place you were

before you passed through me,
to air. Unseen, like wind shifts, you
are sudden breath, a panting

deep that opens fear up in my heart. I
have to hurry, feeling
your lips set and hardening, feeling

your jaws lock and your tongue
sticking, before you get too used to flesh.
Before you learn to bite

down hard, I must teach you how to
eat of the earth,
and how to drink the water.

Matt Dayhoff

Kitty

TOUGH
GLASS

Paul Elliott

Poem

Pound was a beautiful poet
She said,
We should always admire Whitman
For breaking up the wood;
Perhaps so a poet might drag it inside
And whittle it under the light.

And for the moment I forced the line
Across which my many desertions
Blossom to organized retreat,
Until my very life regarded the snow
As if it fell in June
I said,

It is snowing — it is beautiful

She had a collection of chimes
She said,
They would sound beautiful here;
Chained out among the trees,
Their sounds welcome to wander the yard
While deciding when to come in.

And I told her I felt punished
Like a child,
I pushed my face against the pane.
A child says that when he is twenty
He will do as he pleases, while
The world outside moves in its places.

But if the glass is stressed,
(with what weight is mine to impose)
It is not its character to give.
But for the moment I'm sure I have heard it inside;
Reallocating strength, barking commands,
Flexing to shift things around.

As again outside
The river plays out its water,
Hard like liquid diamonds in the sun.
And if a million leaves pull at their leashes
The trees recall their roots
And the glass endures.

And the river stays a river.
And when Suzanne says move,
Come away from the window
It's in the way I back away.

It will be warm again tomorrow

It will be warm again tomorrow
Unseasonably so, someone will say
But I have tried poems about warm days
"It was almost hot today," I have begun
And then written poems about you.

And on a warm day I am tossed about the lawn,
Never sure if I should just turn home, or maybe
Scale a vacant wall and search the grass;
Perhaps for myself and another like you.

And there are walls here I've not seen before,
This is serious because I notice such things
And on one warm day or another, should have
Walked them all at least once,
You see, I feel somehow responsible for walls

Just as I hope some might feel for me
For instance, the one from where I would watch
The street tumble over the hill and into town,
Where I so seldom would go on warm days.

But where you would seem headed just now,
Walking small, as always, your little steps turned
Inward, your eyes too far away to be seen by
A boy bouncing a tennis ball, a green Penn 4,
As new as the grass between you and me.

And I am annoyed at the walk (not your walk)
But the walk between the wall and the grass,
And you and the street you seem now to be
Kicking over the hill and into town.

And without warning, I might simply throw this ball
Though the least thought would promptly reveal how
At this distance, you being so small, and the street
Headed so irrevocably down, there was little more here
Than another way to lose a perfectly good tennis ball.

But if I wasn't thinking, not about the ball at any rate
But maybe about the note you had left on my door,
The one that said you had missed me, but that you would live
(And I suppose you should, you hardly knew me)

The ball would be falling by now,
And I might always remember two things. The first could be
A small black bird flying its tight circle before dropping
Into a tree to my left, and the other simply a desperate
Wish for the ball to hit the sidewalk and bounce.

And after two and a half, it could hit you — just like that
And though you might never give it back,
You could be impressed, and it would be warm
And as you walked into town, I could watch you go.

Entymology
(a study of the second coming)

Their sound is,
To be quite short, different.
But for its very difference
It is a sound I know.

To me, it is far away
And dangerous.

And I resent these creatures, these orphans
For as one who has once feared walls,
And buildings, I
Have quietly warmed to the false
Voices of structure that call out
Everywhere these insects fly.

Or perhaps they are bred for inferior flight
Though in rare moments, I have watched them rise
Up out of their mistakes and fly again,
And have at such times reasoned:
One jumps from a tree because one does.

And yet, all I have learned of their life
Is their death, (though maybe through one
semi-liquid dream, their fulfillment),
And so must still pretend to wonder why
Man makes so very much of sex.

When for me, seventeen becomes a new year;
5, 22, 39 — 56,
This is how it will come to me.
But today, for this instant,

As the popping sound slows and starts
Again, slows twice more and dies,
I am a bit as he is:
Twitching face up on a concrete walk,

A blind eye turned on a sun I no longer trust.
Or even once, within the unit of possibility,
Regaining flight,
Only to be bound once more (tangled)
In the long human hair of a woman.

I remember dreaming about you

I remember dreaming about you
You said,
    When we awake we will
    Remember only what was spoken
That we would not, for instance, recall
That we were cold, only that we said so.

And in my dreams you are not beautiful
Always, or small like you are now
But assume many forms.
There is only one consistency;
I aways know who you are.

And this is the way I want you to be;
Without form, and for me.

And some nights, in some dreams
You take the form of yourself,
(And I mean dreams in quite the literal sense)
You are, for instance, the sound of your
Voice, on the phone.
And I react to you in a new way.

And this is the way you want me to be;
I remember only that we said so.

Joseph Bonomo

Disappearing

The secret was the corner of the "L"
written by couch and love seat,
right angle hinged by a walnut end table
under which I'd lie, curled-up.
Like a plaything I'd furl, oval-like,
against the bristly blue shag rug which ended
right there, my head wedged
into a corner. Angered
by size and sheer uselessness I'd dart
for the dark of my cave, this cubicle
custom-built, to lie in silence
I was sure spoke volumes into the large
mean hearts of my parents. Later that summer,
my friend Paul Burgan and I found Atlantis.
While throwing footballs we sailed,
darkly, over the hill into Kemp Mill
creek, one of many thin fingers
palming the neighborhood. A tiny tributary
ended there, in a large hole
where the earth gave up, caved in
to age, leaving an entrance in sunlight
so black it shone. The football soon became
my footrest, as on my back I dreamed
of what lay beneath me, how history
might be, really, just across the street.
I wanted for years to step into that mouth,
to meet and greet the inhabitants,
to leave the world around me
above me. Not to fear for drowning's sake.

Diane Vance

In The Airport

The three men sit together in the bar
waiting for a southbound plane, a golf trip,
a tan that will last into December.
They speak of women and abortions proud
of the number they can claim for their own.
In Japan, says one, in 1950 —
we still occupied Japan in '50 —
I knew this woman in a bar, a friend.
We used to drink together, that's all,
but she had a sister, and her parents
wanted the sister, who was 10 or 12,
to come to the city to earn money.
Maybe those parents didn't know how the
girls made money, but they knew they made a lot,

a lot for that place in those days, I mean.
So she asked me if I would be the one
to teach her sister butterfly, that's what
we called it, butterfly, an honor to
be asked because the sister was a virgin.
I said ok, she was a friend so why not?
I want to tell you it took all night. The girl
was so afraid I thought I'd never finish
but I can guarantee she was a virgin.
At this all three laugh, straighten and lean
inward toward the rest of the story.
So I kept her, rented a place and bought
furniture, boy, she thought that was something.
I told the sister, the girl spoke no English,

no butterfly with anyone else while
I was there or she'd be out on her ass.
The sister must of got the message through
because that girl took good care of me.
Anything I wanted she did, those Jap
women know how to take care of their men.
And they looked good, those Jap women looked good
when you were there for a year and lonesome
but when you came home they didn't look so good
you know, they just didn't look the same so
I'm glad I didn't marry one, a lot
of our guys did and they were sorry when
they came home and they were stuck with them.
But that little girl, she was a good time.

What I Choose

The morning glories are still open.
I notice this as I carry
A basket of laundry upstairs.

Usually they are puckered tight
Across the bushes by this time,
Blue centers closed to the afternoon,

Unyielding to light or heat.
The laundry is clean and hot
From the coin dryer downstairs.

You have showered, gathered your
Things and are ready to go.
The smell of a second pot of coffee

Steams into the room. The wicker basket,
Full of clothes neatly folded,
Rests in the center of the bed:

The bed where we made love
So unsuccessfully last night.
This worries you because I live alone —

The way I could be satisfied
To kneel and cut chrysanthemums all afternoon,
Fall sun only warm against my back,

Or the way I wrap myself around
Your cool goodbye and still feel happy
Because the light slants through the window

To cast a certain shade of gold into the room
I once saw empty. After you leave,
I put clothes into drawers disorganized.

Last Night at Lenny's

Maybe it was the darkness in the room
or cigarette smoke white on the air
that made me think about you.
I sat next to the music and the mirrored wall
where I watched without turning
couples locked together by eyes liquid
music seeping into bodies and the smell
of perfume through pores opened
by alcohol and heat.
He touched the bass with a movement of pleasure
like your noise under my hands,
until the boundaries of inside and outside
were lost to the music like
my tongue against your spine
or the edge that knowing the end gives to an act.
I could not stop watching the hands in the room
or his hands on the bass, everything charged and
urgent with the feeling of skin.
I wanted to be held insde the motion of fingers
sliding down bass strings, pressing wood,
everything tied to the movement of hands, the way
you told me once you felt changed under mine.